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ABSTRACT

This digest, based on a larger publication of the same title, offers a nine-step process for planning and implementing adaptations to instructional materials for students with disabilities in the inclusive classroom. Introductory material notes that adaptations should be approached as a short-term solution to increase access to the curriculum and to increase the probability the student will be able to complete an academic task and should be considered to be a bridge to skill development, not a substitute for intensive instruction in necessary skills. The steps are: (1) create a plan for adapting materials; (2) identify and evaluate the demands that students are not meeting; (3) develop goals for teaching strategies and making adaptations; (4) determine whether content or format adaptations are needed; (5) identify the features of the materials that need to be adapted; (6) determine the type of adaptation that will enable the student to meet the demand; (7) inform students and parents about the adaptation; (8) implement, evaluate, and adjust the adaptation; and (9) fade the adaptation when possible. (DB)

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Adapting Language Arts, Social Studies, and Science Materials for the Inclusive Classroom

Keith Lenz and Jean Schumaker

When instructional materials present a barrier to student learning, teachers often adapt the materials to allow students greater access to the information to be taught. These adaptations may involve changing the content of the materials (the nature or amount of information to be learned) or changing the format of the materials (the way information is presented to the learner).

For students with mild cognitive disabilities, most adaptations should be a bridge to skill development, not a substitute for intensive instruction in the skills and strategies that students will need to become independent learners. In other words, adaptations should be approached as a short-term solution to increase access to the curriculum and to increase the probability that the students will be able to complete an academic task. However, there may be some cases in which short-term adaptations become permanent adaptations if they are needed by a particular student.

Ideally, adaptations would be designed into curricular materials by the developers, and the built-in adaptations would be broad enough and flexible enough to assist students regardless of their disability. When they are not, teachers must adapt materials themselves, and effective adaptations take time for teachers to design and implement. In some cases, making and implementing adaptations can be more time consuming and complex than teaching the student the skills needed to meet a particular demand.

A careful process can help to ensure that the decision to adapt materials is the correct one and that adaptations will be effective. This digest describes a process consisting of nine steps for planning and implementing materials adaptations.

Step 1. Create a Plan for Adapting Materials

Effective adaptations require sustained development and support. They must be made within the framework of a larger plan that includes consideration of (a) basic and strategic skills instruction and (b) the roles of people involved in the adaptation process. It is important to involve your administrator and curriculum or program coordinator from the beginning, and identify exactly who will be responsible for making, implementing, supporting and evaluating the adaptation over the course of the year. As much as possible, involve students, parents, paraprofessionals, and others. Adaptations that can benefit an entire class or several classes are more likely to be supported and maintained.

Step 2. Identify and Evaluate the Demands that Students Are Not Meeting

The purpose of this step is to define the problem to be addressed by the adaptation. Observe students' performance when they use typical instructional materials. They may have difficulty acquiring or getting the important information from written materials (level 1), storing or remembering the information presented in the materials (level 2), or expressing the information or demonstrating competence on written tests (level 3). If students have difficulty with a given task, different solutions may be required depending on the level of difficulty.

Step 3. Develop Goals for Teaching Strategies and Making Adaptations

Some problems can be solved by adaptations; other problems may signal the need for intensive instruction in skills or strategies. Often, teachers may need to provide adaptations while simultaneously teaching the student the learning strategies he or she needs in order to perform the work. All adaptations lead students to become dependent on the person who makes them. Before an adaptation is made for an individual student, educators must carefully consider the best approach to addressing the student's disability and promoting success. Adaptations should be approached as short-term solutions within a long-term plan for teaching skills and strategies that will promote the student's independence as a learner and ultimately reduce the need for adaptations.

Step 4. Determine Whether Content or Format Adaptations Are Needed

Content adaptations may be made only when the student's Individualized Educational Program (IEP) notes that the general curriculum is inappropriate for this student. Content adaptations must also meet local and state education standards. In some cases, the IEP may address the degree to which the requirements associated with meeting state standards and taking assessments may be modified. The teacher must decide which parts of the curriculum the student will be required to learn and will constitute mastery of the course content.

When the curriculum is considered appropriate for the student, adaptations may focus on format rather than content. Again, the teacher must identify the critical elements of course content that students must learn: First, identify the critical course ideas or concepts. Then identify the information that must be mastered in each unit to ensure that the critical course ideas are

mastered. Finally, determine how students will demonstrate their mastery at the end of each unit and at the end of the course. Format adaptations are made to compensate for mismatches between the presentation or design of the materials and the skills and strategies of the student. In format adaptations, the content is not altered.

Step 5. Identify the Features of the Materials that Need To Be Adapted

The design of materials can present many different types of problems for students with disabilities. Teachers adapting materials should examine each curricular unit for features that might cause a learning problem. For example, the content may be very abstract, complex, or poorly organized, or it might present too much information. It may not be relevant to students or it may be boring. Further, it may call for skills or strategies or background information that the student does not possess. It may present activities that do not lead to mastery, or it may fail to give students cues about how to think about or study the information. Materials also may not provide a variety of flexible options through which students can demonstrate competence. Guidelines for identifying these and other problems in the design of instructional materials may be found in resources like those listed at the end of this digest.

Step 6. Determine the Type of Adaptation That Will Enable the Student To Meet the Demand

Once the materials have been evaluated and possible problem areas identified, the type of format adaptation must be selected. Format adaptations can be made by

(a)Altering existing materials—Rewrite, reorganize, add to, or recast the information so that the student can access the regular curriculum material independently, e.g., prepare a study guide and audiotape.

(b)Mediating existing materials—provide additional instructional support, guidance, and direction to the student in the use of the materials. Alter your instruction to mediate the barriers presented by the materials so that you directly lead the student to interact with the materials in different ways. For example, have students survey the reading material, collaboratively preview the text, and create an outline of the material to use as a study guide.

(c)Selecting alternate materials—Select new materials that are more sensitive to the needs of students with disabilities or are inherently designed to compensate for learning problems. For example, use an interactive computer program that cues critical ideas, reads text, inserts graphic organizers, defines and illustrates words, presents and reinforces learning in smaller increments, and provides more opportunities for practice and cumulative review.

Step 7. Inform Students and Parents About the Adaptation

Adaptations are more successful when they are offered and introduced to students at the beginning of the year. Parents should also be informed about them at the beginning of the year. Students should be taught explicit strategies to use any adaptation effectively and how to process the information received through the adaptation. As students progress, they should be taught how to recognize the need for and request materials adaptations. While content adaptation decisions are made at IEP meetings, decisions about format adaptations may be made informally, and parents may need assurance that content is not being altered and that standards are being met.

Step 8. Implement, Evaluate, and Adjust the Adaptation

As the adaptation is implemented, the teacher should evaluate its effects to determine whether the desired outcomes are being achieved. If not, adjustments will need to be made either in the adaptation or the instructions to the student in its use. Adaptations should significantly reduce failure and learning difficulties.

Step 9. Fade the Adaptation When Possible

Adaptations usually are short-term solutions to allow classroom learning and participation until the needed skills and strategies can be taught. Once the adaptation is in place, the teacher should begin to plan with other teachers how to teach the needed skills and strategies. Once the student has learned the necessary skills and strategies, the adaptation should be faded. The adaptation should not be removed until the student possesses the skills and strategies to learn and complete tasks independently. For some students, an adaptation may be required for several months, while for others, it may be maintained for years.

For more information and for examples of materials adaptations, see *Adapting Language Arts, Social Studies, and Science Materials for the Inclusive Classroom* by Keith Lenz and Jean Schumaker.

RESOURCES

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